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ABSTRACT

Student affairs professionals in community colleges are facing several major issues in need of resolution including: the insufficient use of existing knowledge about adolescent and adult development and organization development in program design and execution; and the insufficient use of knowledge of program evaluation for understanding the effects of programs on students. In addition, student affairs is weakened by the lack of an adequate conceptual model for the delivery of student services in the community college; and by the abandonment of the historic integration of the liberal arts and student personnel services. These problems can be addressed through: (1) administrative support of self-improvement programs for professional staff; (2) provision of the opportunity to read the literature on organizational development; (3) the sharing of cross-department resources; (4) efforts to encourage student personnel workers to understand and use program evaluation data; (5) the development of a service delivery model that considers the interdependence of teaching and counseling, the role of student affairs in educational programming, and institutional planning/marketing; and (6) recognition that the goals of liberal arts and student personnel are the same. (LAL)

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STUDENT AFFAIRS IN THE 80s:

Implications for the Use of Theory in Practice

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[1]

A student of history of student affairs in the twentieth century knows that a few eventful "moments" have had catalytic results in the shape of the profession. Professional practice today is notably different than it would have been had not these events occurred. I am, of course, referring to such watershed events, or decisions as the case may be, as Yoakum's paper issued in 1919 calling for a personnel bureau in colleges, the publication of the two brochures--the first in 1937 and the second in 1949--called the Student Personnel Point of View, the Truman Commission Report in 1949 which initiated a commitment to a public policy of equal access to higher education in America, the GI Bill, the launching of sputnik in 1957, the initiation of several landmark studies such as those of Erikson, Perry, Kohlberg, Chickering, and Levinson, the promotion of the T.H.E. project in ACPA in the late 60s and early 70s, and, in very recent years, the avalanche of publications on theories of late adolescence and early adulthood. We are a different profession

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[1]A presentation to student services personnel from Canada and the United States at the conference Serving Students in the 80s, Toronto, May 1, 1985.

today than we were then and the difference in some significant measure can be attributed to the effects of these and, quite likely a few other, events and decisions that have spotted our history since the turn of the century.

In the two-year college arena, the history of student affairs in this century seems more a series of peaks and valleys linked to spurts in the growth of the colleges themselves. As the colleges grew and expanded in number in the 1930s, for example, student affairs was reported to occupy critical roles in the overall development of students. These roles were growing in number and generally welcomed by teaching and administrative colleague alike, at least according to Junior College Journal authors. Likewise, as the nature of the colleges shifted toward greater community responsibility, as in the decade of the fifties, student affairs seemed to flourish as measured both by size and scope. Then, like America itself, complacency reigned for a time until the weakened nature of the profession was "discovered" by researchers who published their findings in the now famous Carnegie Report and shocked community college leaders into doing something about the condition. It came at a particularily good time, for America was rich and the community college "movement" was in full swing. As the two-year colleges opened with their fresh commitment to "community responsiveness," student affairs professionals were hired in record numbers to guide the students through the complicated maze of course, curriculum, and career choices. Two-year college student affairs

professionals gained an image in the profession at large as innovators operating on the very cutting edge of higher education.

Both our colleges and our profession have changed in recent years. In contrast to the flourishing years, the two-year college currency, at least in the States, is not as stable as it once was. Two-year colleges have not always produced what they claimed they could. Though access largely has been achieved, opportunity for all admitted has not. Retention is a problem. Literacy is a problem. The quality of teaching is a problem. Real opportunity for graduates is a problem. Our image, in short, is no longer lily white, and, deservedly or not, student affairs professionals are seen in too many circles as part of the problem, not the solution.

Our current condition, therefore, clearly is tied to our history, both distant and near, and our responses to our condition will be enhanced, I think, if our sense of history is vivid. We are in charge of our future, and it is encumbent on us to understand how we got where we are if we are to make wise choices for our future.

I am concerned about our current condition, though, perhaps strangely, optimistic about our future. Our problems do have solutions. Our profesional know-how extends far beyond normal levels of use. Our technology is improving rapidly. Our theories are being tested constantly and are standing the

examinations. Our graduate schools are catching up to the knowledge production and are teaching for the future.

My hope for this session is that we might identify a few issues or concerns about the practice of student affairs in our community colleges in the 1980s and consider specific contributions we might make to their resolution. I will make the initial list and I will share my ideas about them and about our resolution goal, but I hope you will listen carefully, think seriously about these and/or other concerns, and critique them passionately when the opportunity is presented.

Here are my concerns for the practice of student affairs in community colleges in the 80s:

1. We use knowledge of adolescent and adult development insufficiently in program design.

2. We use knowledge of organization development insufficiently in program execution.

3. We use knowledge of program evaluation insufficiently to understand effects of programs on students.

4. We have no adequate conceptual model for the delivery of student services in the community college.

5. We have abandoned the historic integration of the liberal arts and student personnel.

Obviously, I believe that if we recognize these problems, and

take wide-spred action to do something about them, we can instill excitement and challenge into our everyday activities and perhaps make this "moment" one to shape the nature of future practice. That is my belief and it is why I am so optimistic about our future.

The Use of Knowledge of Human Development

Here is a comment I hear often from my two-year college colleagues, and, as a matter of fact, from my own former students: "I find that I really do not think of theory nor of research when I design programs for students. I am hurried by the press of other responsibilities and I do not have time to consider reflectively how to enhance student development by the application of our collective knowledge base. But, you know its curious that when I look back over what I have done, I can see that my knowledge of theory and research must have been operating unconsciously because it is easy to explain my reasoning for the original decisions in theoretical terms."

I find reason both for encouragement or hope and cynicism or despair in this type of comment. I am uplifted in my concern for the profession by the evidence that our previously accumulated knowledge is accessable by our practitioners at some level; I am dismayed by the evidence that our practitioners staunchly maintain that they do not have time to reflect on what they are planning to do, when they testify that they often engage

in reflection after their work is done.

We need more reflection, not less, on our intentional efforts to help students systematically or programmatically, including post-event evaluation as we shall see later. It is an unfortunate axiom that experience is our most trusted teacher in the student affairs profession. Were our experiences always the correct ones, then I would have little to say about this condition. But they often are not. We like to appropriate ideas from other colleagues, from other institutional efforts which someone there claimed was "successful," and from our own institutional historical legacy which often dictates "how things are done around here." Experiences can translate into wisdom, as with those arising from life itself, if they were enriched by knowledge, flavored by a spirit of experimentation, and tempered by reflective judgment. Experiences also can translate into myopia, as with those deadened by unproductive repetition, if they were absent of personal investment, destitute of sensitive intentionality, or impaired by the anesthesia of duty to the job rather than to the student.

I understand, to some extent, why practitioners make no more use of our accumulated theories and research findings than they do. Theory is proffered to explain phenomena, and, as such, is valuable to the extent that it allows precise explanation of very specific facts of scientific interest. Practitioners are more likely to be interested in the "total person" than some isolated piece of the personality, ego, or self structure. Research

findings, on the other hand, are valuable to the extent than they are generalizable to the specific population for which the practitioner has direct responsibility. It is peculiar, but usually true, that research which is generalizable also is ladened with language and technique often known only to the researcher and to a small segment of the profession with specialized training and/or interest similar to the researcher. Practitioners are interested in simple ideas worthy of experimentation which can be transported to any setting with nearly guaranteed effects which can be intuitively inferred. The problem is, to the extent that I am correct in my judgments about practitioner needs, neither theory nor research is available in the form most desired.

I should say, if it is not apparent already, that I believe that there is enormous value to practice through understanding and using extant knowledge. The use of knowledge may be the key to accountability in our profession, even more so than the use of evaluation procedures. Obviously, both are necessary, but without the former, the later always is problematic. In my judgment, knowledge-based program design is more attuned to student need (not necessarily student want), more explicit in its intent, more communicable to faculty and administrative colleagues, more cost calculable, more replicable, and more answerable to institutional values.

I believe that the best route to bridging this gap is the adoption of long-term commitments by administrators to support

self improvement programs for professional staff. I believe that ample evidence exists to support the contention that college student personnel professionals want to use theory and research and that, if given the opportunity and necessary support by institutional leaders, would respond to a systematic program of reading, analysis, and use of knowledge now relatively foreign to them.

Use of Knowledge of Organization Development

Relying again on feedback from our colleagues and my former students, I am reminded of the importance of this body of knowledge by such comments as, "My successes almost always were associated with efforts in which I intentionally applied what I knew about how to change the organization. I have found my knowledge of organization development every bit as helpful as a student affairs administrator as my knowledge of student development."

Practitioners seem to have a good intuitive sense of what needs to be done to change the organization, but very few have engaged in formal education in the area. Preparation programs have included little instruction in organization development until recently. Even now, the efforts by graduate professors are hampered by their own lack of education and/or by the notorious institutional inertia of university curriculum committees. Progress is evident on this front, both in the graduate schools

and in practice. Professionals are more aware of the area of knowledge and are taking steps, though timid in most cases, to improve understanding.

Like most accumulated knowledge areas, I suppose, the field of study known as organization development is expansive. It is a relatively new field, as compared to root disciplines, such as psychology and sociology, but has amassed an enormous body of literature nevertheless. An important characteristic of the literature, however, is its near absence of theory and its clutteredness with ungeneralizable research and observations by practicing consultants.

Knowledge of organization development, even that which seems technically ungeneralizable, possesses high utility value. The literature often is presented as models, conceptually oriented to the practitioner. It is characterized by intuitive logic and by application of wisdom injected by experienced and trusted consultants. Its language is burdensome, as is most any technical field, but when understood as intented by the experts, is applicable by most student affairs professionals in the natural contexts in which they work.

Use of this knowledge allows anyone engaged in programmatic education to predict likely problem areas of full acceptance of an innovation and to plan contingently. College student personnel professionals often are programmers, especially those with administrative assignments, and the need for knowledge of

how the organization likely will respond to an effort to change it represents an indispensable implement for practice.

Two conditions are required for greater use of organization development knowledge--opportunity to read the literature (there is nothing inherently difficult in it) and opportunity to attract, and, to some extent, manage cross-department resources toward the solution to institutional problems.

Efforts aimed at the retention of students classically represent a problem in organization development, but which gets treated like a problem of teaching and counseling. We respond to the need to retain students by intensifying our efforts, and that may help, but it only treats a small part of the effort. Retention programs often call for wide-spread participation of teachers, counselors, administrators, and even students themselves. They redirect energy, they cause questions to be raised by participants which encounter the normative culture of the organization, they require the reallocation of resources competitively sought by professionals for other priorities, they demand continuous leadership, they beg for responsiveness to feedback, and they depend on forces normally outside the sphere of influence of faculty and counselors. Retention efforts are, in short, efforts in organization development, usually employing a combination of rational-empirical, normative-reeducative, and power-coercive strategies. If they are to succeed, and they typically have not when viewed at an institutional level and from a long-term perspective, they must be treated professionally as

an institutional adaptation to needed reform.

The Use of Knowledge of Program Evaluation

Each of us in this room is aware of our collective deficiencies in this area. Student personnel professionals simply do not evaluate their programmatic efforts, at least not systematically and hardly ever scientifically. Occasionally, we ask students whether they were "satisfied" with some service and we do need to know that. but it does not answer the really important questions, such as:

- What effects on students, if any, can be attributed to the programmatic activities?
- Where effects on students, if any, the "right" effects? Did we accomplish what we tried to accomplish?
- Were programmatically associated changes in students, if any, independent of other structured educational activities?
- What is the overall, longitudinal effects of college on students independent of entering characteristics?
- Are our programmatic efforts cost effective?

Evaluation rarely is easy. In the context of student development, it is particularily complicated. I know that and you know that. But the level of difficulty cannot deter us from the compelling need to know whether our work has the effect

intended.

You hardly need further evidence of the difficulty of evaluation, but I will mention one factor anyway because it is so often ignored. There usually is a prior step to evaluation (Isn't there always?). It is virtually impossible to determine precise degrees of change in students unless we have exact measures of entering status on dimensions of interest. This step is called assessment and it is a necessary prerequisite to evaluation.

Thus, in order to evaluate our programmatic efforts, we must first assess developmental status of our students. This, I am sorry to say, is the area of greatest weakness in our professional know-how and technology. Our techniques and instruments for assessment are infantile in comparison to most other areas of professional practice. It is a most perplexing situation, but it is not unconquerable.

I recommend that we accept our current condition or plight, but respond to it positively by taking what actions we can. In my judgment, there are several action steps we can take which might have almost immediate beneficial results:

- Reach consensus among your staff regarding the top two or three developmental dimensions you accept responsibility for promoting. Do not pick too many. Be specific. (Remember, this is where theory helps.)

- Decide on a specific population in a specific context and prepare precise goals. Try to remember that we are trying to take baby-steps, not gargantuan leaps.

- Divide your staff into three teams. Team one will be responsible for the collection of quantitative data, team two for qualitative data, and team three for synthesis, analysis, and reporting of findings. There is nothing to keep members from joining more than one team, but I believe it is important to hold each responsible for the task assigned to each. I also believe that is is important to train each team in their specific responsibilities.

- Prepare an institutional spreadsheet containing each of the student-subjects chosen and record selective data in the following categories: Entering Characteristics, Entry Assessment, Intermediate Progress, and Exit Evaluation. These data make take many forms, of your choice; however, each should include both quantitative and qualitative forms of data, except for entering characteristics most likely to be of a quantitative/demographic type. Input to the spreadsheet should be the responsibility of teams one and two. Analysis and reporting should be done by team three.

I could carry this "fantasy planning exercise" much further, but will not out of a belief that you can see where is going and fill in the blanks if it holds interest for you. The important aspect of the idea is that it does not require near impossible

feats. It does require training, organization, and commitment--commodities available in abundance, I should think, on most student personnel staffs.

Need for a Conceptual Model

I would not be surprised if this topic generated some controversy or disagreement among the particpants of this conference. Conceptual models for practice do not have unblemished records in the annals of our history. Some "believers" think they are the answer to all ills of practice--a congregation infiltrated, unfortunately, by some folks more able to believe than to "do." Other professionals reserve their loyalty to institutionals forms of guidance they can see, such as organization patterns and management practices. This latter group sees little or no value in conceptual models, arguing that they have too much to do to worry about some mental exercise to create an abstraction. There are, of course, many who fall somewhere in between these extremes regarding their view of the utility of models.

Setting aside the uneven acceptance of conceptual models in the student personnel profession for the moment, it remains a fact that improvements in practice originate as an idea. Someone imagines a better world, or a better mousetrap, and communicates the idea to others. The form of that latter communication may be seen as a model for the application of the idea. Generally,

ideas presented in this form are not accepted uniformly. Sometimes, they are rejected out of hand initially, but are revived under other circumstances. It was known by early mercantile marines, for example, that citrus fruit juice cured scurvy for 264 years before it became an accepted practice! It took 25 years for hybrid corn to be accepted, 22 years for television, 13 for radar, 9 for the safety razor, 6 for the ballpoint pen, and even 9 for the oral contraceptive, for heavens sake. Ideas in student personnel enjoy no better track record. We have known of the work of Erikson, for example, for forty years, but only have adopted his formulations as workable in practice during the past decade.

I believe that we do need conceptual models in our profession, and we need them urgently in the community college arena. More and more voices call for a reduction in influence in community college education by student personnel specialists. The chorus includes presidents who are tired of defending the work of people they really do not understand, academic administrators who are fighting to gain control of resources they believe may be used ineffectively, and even national leaders who believe that student affairs represent the "weak link" in the community college education chain. But we need the conceptual models for ourselves, too. We appear to be unclear of our priorities and of our delivery systems. Are our roles developmental? If so, which forms of development are our responsibility? If not, how are we to help students? Are we

career development specialists? Academic advisors? Teachers? Industrial relations directors? Counselors? Coaches? What, for heavens sake, can we agree is central to our educational roles?

This is not nearly so critical an issue in residential colleges and universities as it is in community colleges and commuter colleges and universities. Those of us most concerned about professional service in these types of institutions really need to think about our jobs conceptually. I believe, for example, that any model which ignores the absolute interdependence of teaching and the curriculum vis a vis counseling/advising and the extracurriculum is near worthless. I believe that any model which ignores the role of educational programmer for student affairs specialists is of little value. I believe that any model which ignores the roles of institutional planning/marketing and the college/community interface is missing the point.

We could debate the essential ingredients of a viable model for community college student affairs practice, but I will not continue my one-sided argument in this form. You can, and should, continue the dialogue.

Our Legacy with the Academic Mainstream

I began this presentation by touching on some important historical events, decisions, and turning points. We are tied to this history as we should be. My opening comments showed our link to earlier times, but of this century. I would like to stress in my closing remarks that our professional history goes back much farther than 85 years. Concern for the total development of students has been a noble hallmark of higher education in America for over three hundred years. In part, this acceptance of responsibility for the whole person is what distinguished the American system from those flourishing in Germany and England.

How was this concern expressed? How was it accomplished? In simple terms, teachers accepted responsibility for all forms of development and promoted them <u>through the curriculum</u>, and for decade after decade the central curriculum in American higher education was what we know now as the liberal arts. The philosophy, the goals, the language, and even the strategies of the liberal arts and of college student personnel are remarkably similar. No wonder. Our profession is a direct descendent, having its genesis in growth in institutional size, nature, and complexity and a meteoric rise of teacher interest in scholarly research. When teachers no longer were able, or perhaps interested, in tending to student's personal concerns, institutional leaders recognized the historically significant tradition and commitment to development beyond the intellectual

forms alone and gave birth to new educators with specialized, but nevertheless educationally integrated, functional responsibilities.

Listen to these historic goals of higher education:

- to develop the whole person by meeting the student's ethical, social, intellectual, physical, and spiritual needs
- to provide learning experiences which encourage self-directed growth and fulfillment
- to encourage and support an integrated structure of knowledge and the interrelatedness of disciplines
- to encourage serious examination of a range of values-oriented issues as well as factual issues

Are these the goals of the liberal arts or of student personnel? Obviously, they are the goals of both, but, as a matter of fact, this particular list comes from literature in the liberal arts. If these be the common goals of our profession and of a mainstream curriculum of higher education, would not we be wise to rejoin our efforts. It is, I think, our destiny. It takes into account our long history of commitment to the total development of students. It recognizes some of our current dilemmas, especially those which fracture student services from other educational activities.

A bright future for a profession, like a healthy

personality, requires mature reflection on the past and the present, judicious action by members to strengthen collective weaknesses, and assertive, but thoughtful, steps forward. I hope I can be a part of your efforts to take those steps.

Best wishes to you for the remainder of this conference.

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